

Contributions

MY FAVORITE NEW TESTAMENT CHARACTER—A Symposium

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Saint Peter

It is natural for one to have a favorite among every class of individuals with which he is acquainted. Thus one has his favorite poet, his favorite book, his favorite occupation, and his favorite theme, which is often better known as his "hobby."

Just so among the characters spoken of in the New Testament.

There are many noble ones and we love them all, but, for some reason which perhaps we are unable to explain, there is one of them who has become the special object of admiration. He is the one of whom we speak most. We love to recount the incidents connected with his life, and, if we are Sunday school teachers, never tire of going to his experience for our illustrations.

There is one among the many noble New Testament characters who fills these conditions in my experience. He is one who was intensely human,—whose life, before his conversion, filled with many of the blunders which short-sighted humanity is heir to; but who, after Pentecost, was possessed of a courage and a steadiness which made him a mighty power for righteousness. He was one who brought forth from the Master the severest rebukes and yet received from him the most tender words of commendation. I need hardly say that I speak of the impulsive, impetuous Peter.

There are many incidents in his life, and especially in his association with the Christ, that have made me love to study him. And, with all the thoughtless things that his impulsiveness prompted him to say, there are many of his expressions that are truly beautiful and full of meaning.

On that morning when he and his partners were washing their nets, discouraged with the fruitlessness of their night's labor,—when Jesus entered his boat and commanded him to launch out into the deep and let down his nets for a draught, what could have shown a more implicit obedience than the words of Peter, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." And then, when the net was drawn in, filled to breaking, what a sense of unworthiness and humility he showed as he fell down at Jesus' knees and exclaimed, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Aside from the noble things that Peter did and said, there is something in his weaknesses that draws one to him. The darkest period of his life was the night of his denial of the Master. We sometimes find fault with him for this failure of his faith, but what could be more natural in the face of a howling mob who had apparently reduced his

Master to submission? The fact that he went out and wept bitterly shows how deeply he felt his shame, and we who are also human cannot but sympathize with him in his weakness.

But all the blunders, mistakes, and weaknesses in Peter's early life find their compensation in his life and work after Pentecost. The impulsiveness and impetuosity which had brought upon him the Master's reproof were now turned into new channels, becoming an aid to him rather than a hindrance. The fear that once had caused him to deny his Lord gave way to courage, and the Peter who had trembled at the glance of a Jewish maiden now sat fearlessly in the presence of the rulers and the high priest, and when requested to cease teaching in the name of Jesus, said, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

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Saint John

Some years since there was written a sweet and singular story called, "My Saint John." The reading of the strange booklet brought blessings to many souls. The scene was laid in the midst of a slum district and the author described the "new life" of a saved soul, the hero of the story and the "Saint John." I do not wish to criticize a story so pure in its purpose and so lofty in its character as was "My Saint John." But my memory never reverts to the little book, except it brings a pang of regret to my heart that any soul, however saintly, should have been called, even fancifully, *Saint John*.

The Apostle John is my favorite New Testament character because he is purely and strikingly spiritual. He inspires one not for what he does, but for what he *is*. He grasps the truth that Christ's message is first of all to the inner life; he abides in Christ; he dwells upon the things that are fadeless and that endure.

Large-hearted—he is a loving, tender, sensitive soul, the beloved disciple who leaned upon Jesus' bosom, to whom Jesus entrusted his mother. He dwells in an unparalleled friendship with the Master; he lingers at the cross of the Crucified Redeemer and heralds the tidings of the Risen Lord.

Deep-souled—he is the Divine, the theologian of the Kingdom. He climbs the Mount of Transfiguration and embraces the deep things of God. His is the universal, the ideal gospel. What sacred truths, what sublime thoughts St. John has treasured in the Gospel and Epistles that bear his name. How much poorer we would be if bereft of the gems, resplendent with heavenly glory, that shine in the golden writings of Saint John! He glorifies God with a sweeter humility than marks any other disciple of the Master. Distinctly and unconsciously this charming characteristic permeates his chapters thru-out. The grandeur of simplicity crowns his matchless character.

Far-seeing—a lonely prisoner upon the Isle of Patmos, his spirit is with the called and the Redeemed; the eyes of his soul look far out into the mystic hereafter. The light of the things that are unseen gleams thru his prison bars in radiance. The vision of the New Jerusalem, the City of God illumines his cell. Down thru the ages has come to point upward the weary, weeping world, the song of the City "whose Builder and Maker is God," the Better Land in the hope of which our earth is made a better land. Henry Van Dyke calls Tennyson "the poet of the endless life." Fitfully we call St. John the Apostle of the endless life.

Saint John is the Apostle of *love*. If it so be that in the resurrection of the Just we shall be like Jesus, then the heavenly transformation that shall make us so, will be less marvelous in this Saint who attained so nearly the perfect love manifested in Christ.

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Saint Paul

Paul.—the Apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.

Of all the great characters of the New Testament no one is of more use or of greater value to the Christian of today, than the Apostle Paul. His life was the greatest example of that secret life of power and influence, which is a life hid with Christ in God. No other life contains so many characteristics that need to be made intensely practical in this generation. He was and is an example for the present and an ideal for the future. No person, Christian or pagan, can read the history of his self sacrificing life without being moved with a feeling of greatest respect.

First.—We admire him for having the courage of his convictions, a trait in character that is lacking to day. When he was converted he turned around completely and faced the enemy. After short years of preparation he began his famous missionary amid criticism and trials. No longer popular but a Christian, he fearlessly proclaimed his message in all its power and simplicity. It is a question to day whether a man can fearlessly preach the gospel and be in favor with all men.

Second.—He was a Christian in the fullest sense of the word, therefore a missionary. Giving us that great example, which if practiced to day, would divest our worship of that injurious thought of self and fulfil the ultimate mission of the church, the salvation of precious human souls.

Third.—He was the embodiment of the need of the church at the present time. Earnest, zealous and filled with Spirit. To use his own language he was willing to spend and be spent in the Master's service.

Thus, very briefly, we have a character sketch of one of the greatest lives history records. His life was one of progress, ever upward, ever onward, he pressed toward the prize of the mark of the high calling of God